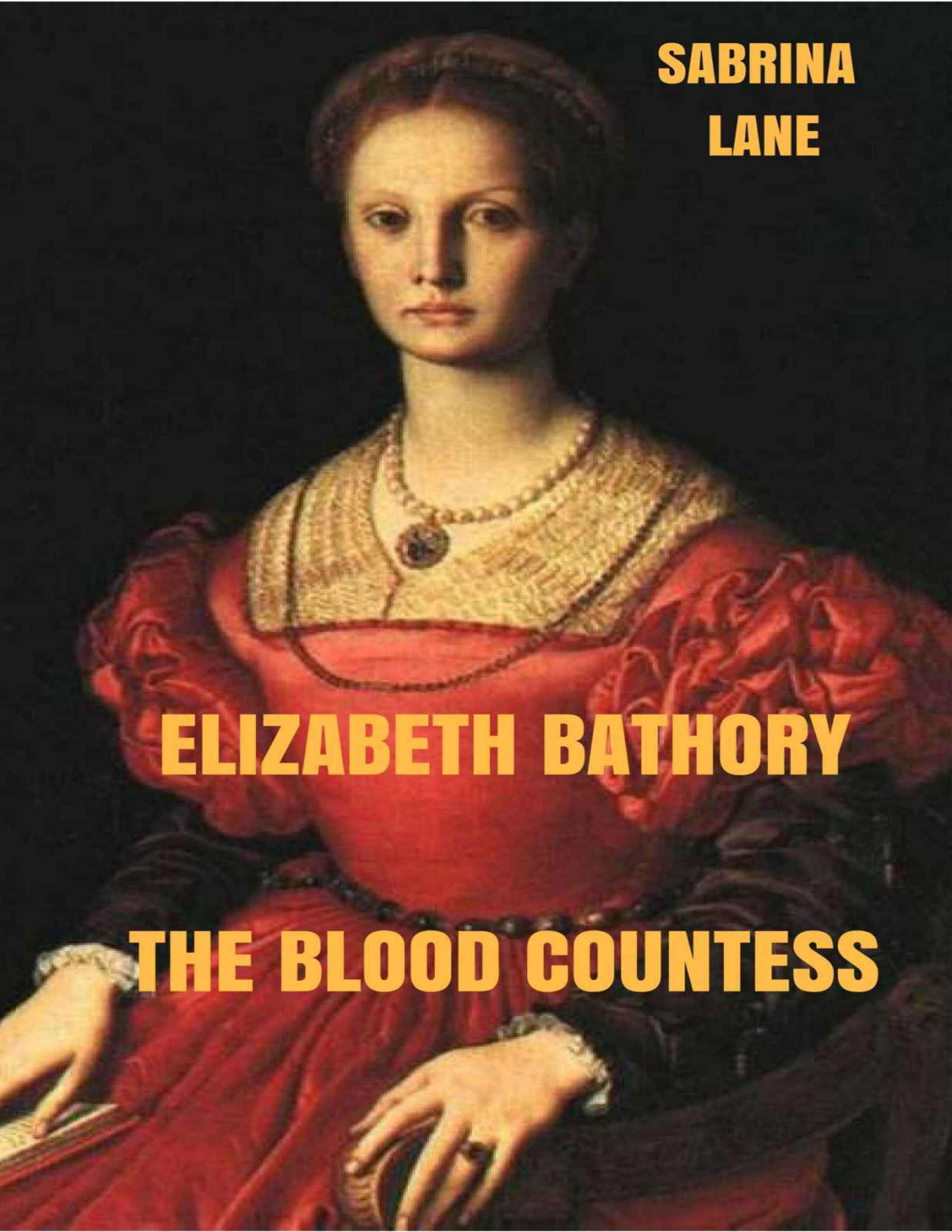
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ELIZABETH BATHORY
THE BLOOD COUNTESS

ELIZABETH BATHORY:

THE BLOOD COUNTESS

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Part I: Elizabeth Báthory's Life and Times

Introduction

Countess Elizabeth Báthory (1560-1614- Báthory Erzsébet for the Magyars, Elzbiete for the Slovaks ,Czechs and Poles, and Elizabeth Bathory in English), was from one of the most important Hungarian famililies that provided a Transylvanian prince and a king of Hungary and

Poland. The legend says Elizabeth used to have a bath in blood of the girls to keep her body and soul young and has been named a witch or vampire for this. Considered the most prolific female serial killer, she received the nicknames "The Tiger of Csejte", "Countess Dracula" or "The Blood Countess".

The life of Elizabeth Báthory may have inspired Bram Stoker's Dracula. Some claim that Dracula might have been a compound of Elizabeth Báthory and Vlad the Impaler. With 650 alleged victims, Báthory might be considered one of the most prolific serial killers in history.

Torture, violence and cruelty were endemic in the period in which Elizabeth Báthory lived. Her contemporary , Queen Elizabeth I of England, presided over many tortures and executions. Medieval punishments like quartering and drawing were quite definitely an integral part of public life. However, the scale of Báthory 's brutality was off of the charts, even for her era. She is actually cited by the Guinness Book of Records as a serial killer without equal. Many historians and writers think that she murdered at least 650 girls.

The Blood Countess has fascinated the public since her arrest in 1610. Her story took an extra dimension, experienced through the 1960s and 1970s with the publication of several movies and books about her. We actually

know little about her crimes.The overall tendency in contemporary history concludes that her guilt might have been exaggerated. Truth be told, she could have been the victim of rival nobles who wanted to take her properties. However, she remains one of the most infamous murderers.

Chapter 1: Early Life

The real story of Elizabeth Báthory is actually even more complicated compared to the legend. She was born on the 7th August 1560 into one of the most illustrious and wealthy Protestant families in Europe. She was the daughter of Baron George Báthory (Ecsed branch) and Baroness Anna Báthory (Somlyo branch), who were Báthory by birth. Such marriage was not unusual among the aristocracy of Europe, for the reason that the purity of the noble line was viewed as very important. Her mother's father had been the Voivod of Transylvania, and her mother's brother became one of the most famous Polish kings. Other members of the family were less respectable however. Elizabeth's brother was a known drunkard and lecher and Anna, her cousin, was accused of practicing witchcraft. Elizabeth spent her childhood at the family estate in Nyirbator, Hungary near the Romanian border and was raised as a Protestant in a period when the King of Hungary and most of the Lords were Catholic.

Elizabeth was born in a Europe shredded by wars between Turks and Christians. The aristocratic families ruled in the counties and claimed their rights as nobles above the peasants and lands. The world was divided in two parts: the nobles, owners of the estates, powerful and wealthy, and the peasants, wich were regarded as worthless, as objects to be used and be rid as they were no more needed. Nobles could dispense justice wich included the death penalty; hanging and dismemberment were common punishments, and Elizabeth Báthory was a member of the ruling elite. Peacetime years were hardly ever nonviolent. Crop failure and confiscation of supplies caused frequent famines and epidemics. In contrast, culture boomed; books were published, schools were founded by aristocratic courts, and patronage work was done.

Besides the exterior danger coming from the Ottoman Empire, Hungary was also facing inner struggles, due to the conflicts between Slovaks, Austrians and Hungarians. The Báthory family was one of the richest, oldest and most powerful in Hungary. They were known as brutal warriors, but they also had a history of mental illness.

Probably the most remarkable personality was Stefan Báthory. Besides the Principality of Transylvania, he held the title of Polish King and was a politician during the Turkish occupation. He was notorious for a lot of

reasons: some called him an "enemy of women" and others named him "a tyrant with bloody hands." Some people claim that he died of epilepsy, which occurred in his family , others stated it was because of syphilis.

Zigmund Báthory was Stefan's nephew. Several historians claim that he suffered from epilepsy, the family illness. He is also believed to have struggled with impotency, but according to others he was a homosexual. Gabriel Báthory, the Prince of Transylvania, was Elizabeth's nephew. He was said to be cruel, tyrannical, and sexually debauched, however his life has not been investigated sufficiently until now.

Elizabeth was in all probability well educated, considering that time and even more remarkable because she was a woman. She could read and write in Hungarian, Latin, Slovak, German and Greek, when most Hungarian nobles could not even read or write. She learned botany, mathematics, astronomy, biology and religion. She was beautiful and smart, but she was spoiled and sadistic also. From early childhood she started out to suffer extreme mood swings and violent uncontrollable rages, wich caused some historians to think that she had early traits of neurological disorder or epilepsy. Her family also suffered from the inbreeding, normal amongst the noble families at the time, wanting to maintain the blood pure. It seems that Elizabeth was abused as a child by her aunt, who taught her

about sadomasochism. One of her uncles apparently instructed her as a satanist, impelling her to be a part of dark rituals in the family castle of Ecsed. She was additionally allowed to witness brutal disciplinary measures applied by her family's officers on their estates.

An episode from Elizabeth's childhood had a solid impact on her. It is said that she watched a brutal execution handed out by her family's officials on the estates. A group of gypsies were invited to her home at Ecsed Castle. One of them was blamed for selling his children to the Turks; he was found guilty and sentenced to death. The gypsy was sewn up in the belly of a dying horse and left to die. The execution was viewed by many, yet nobody showed sympathy. This incident might have influenced her future behaviour, since it taught Elizabeth that peasants could be killed without any retribution.

When Elizabeth was 11 or 12, she was betrothed to Ferenc Nádasdy of another aristocratic family, and, as tradition reqired, Elizabeth had gone to live with Ferenc's family in Castle Sarvar, in the western side of Hungary. The legend claims that a year or two later, during the summer of 1573, Elizabeth became infatuated with Laszlo Bende, a young nobleman. She was pregnant at the age of thirteen; massive amounts of money were paid by the Báthory family to cover the scandal. Elizabeth was retrieved by her

mother under the guise of an sickness and taken into seclusion. Her child was taken into Transylvania never to be seen or heard of again. The legend also says that Nádasdy castrated Laszlo and feed his hounds with the remains.

Chapter 2: Married Life

On May 8, 1575, Elizabeth and Ferenc Nádasdy were married in a grand wedding with 4,500 noble guests. Since she outranked her husband, Elizabeth's name stayed the same and Ferenc became Báthory-Nádasdy. She became Countess, wich came with ten castles. He was a soldier,and spent much time away from home. Elizabeth mostly lived by herself with her trusted servants in her favourite castle, Csejte, a wedding gift from her husband. You will find speculations that Nádasdy taught her torture methods; other historians think he was ignorant of her activities. But all researchers agree that Elizabeth practiced almost all of her crimes in his absence.

Ferenc possessed excellent skill in sport and fight, but was no scholar. In 1578 he became chief commander of Hungarian army, leading it to war against the Turks, and, with time, he received the name "The Black Knight

of Hungary". This nickname was the outcome of a fierce reputation as a warrior and interrogator of Ottoman prisoners. Nádasdy took part in almost every significant battle regarding Hungary during his lifetime. When he was away at fight, Elizabeth was in control of the estates and was great at it. She traveled from castle to castle,recieving guests, paying bills, and consulting with her court administrators and supervisors.

Some say that Ferenc showed Elizabeth how to dicipline the young female servants who had made some mistakes. A favourite in the summertime was to cover the person in honey and let bees and other insects bite. Other methods were to rub stinging nettles plants over the naked body, to tie the servants to a tree in the woods and leave them or jab fine needles into the genitals and underneath the fingernails. These punishments were cruel, but they were common practice in the past.

It is not known whether or not Ferenc was aware of the actions of his wife while he was away, but it is well known that he liked torturing servants too, when he was home. Elizabeth and Ferenc had spent time together participating in activities that might be characterized as sadistic today. Ferenc tortured servants, although he didn't torture them to death, as Elizabeth did. There are also tales of the couple patronising numerous satanists and occultists and engaging in diabolic rites.

There is almost no information on whether the marriage was a happy one. Elizabeth is known to have been a good wife in Ferenc's presence, but he was frequently absent. It is claimed that during these intervals she is said to have taken several young men as well as women lovers. It was almost ten years before the birth of their first child. The couple had eventually at least five children, three daughters and two sons: Anna, Orsolya, Katalin, Andras and Pal. Only Anna, Katalin, and Pal would survive into adulthood. As was the custom of the time, the children were entrusted to a nurse and were raised by tutors. It is also a period when Elizabeth had three of her most trusted servants: Dorka, who was a strong peasant woman, Ilona Jó, the children's nurse, and a dwarf man named Ficzkó. At that time the tortures became more lethal.

On 4 January 1604, at 48 years old, Ferenc died of a leg infection; Elizabeth and Ferenc had been married for 29 years. Before dying, he confided Elizabeth along with his heirs to Gyorgy Thurzó. It is also the time when the Countess took Anna Darvulia into her trusted servant group and, it is said, into her bed as a lover. Many claim that Anna led the coming monstruous tortures. It is also the time that legend says that Elizabeth discovered the therapeutic effect of blood, on striking a servant who accidentally pulled her hair whilst combing. After this discovery, it is stated that she made the decision to take baths in the blood of young girls,

despite the fact that none of the several witness accounts mention these blood baths.

Elizabeth Báthory was now a widow and, additionally, one of the few women in Hungary who had real power in a world dominated by men. In the 16th century, the fate of a woman alone relied on her protectors. If she had adult children or powerful relatives, she could live a contented life on a part of the property. But widows usually became targets of attacks aimed at their wealth; therefore younger women with small children often chose a new marriage.

Elizabeth Báthory established her principal residence at Castle Csejte, continued to support her husband's charitable efforts and paid his debts. Still, her large properties were expensive. Despite frequent demands, the King showed no interest in paying back the amount of money loaned by Ferenc Nádasdy. The financial pressure increased together with the disappearances and deaths of her servants. Parents commenced hiding their daughters each time Elizabeth visited their towns.

Chapter 3: The Crimes

The wars left a lot of young unmarried women in as well as a a lack of available men. It was considered a great honor to become servant in one of the great houses. But servant girls started to disappear from Elizabeth Báthory's properties. These disappearances were only accidental occurences in the beginning. Disease and death were very common in those times; the official justification was usually cholera, perhaps the most common disease. The clergy accepted the explanations and continued to perform funerals. Still, a pattern started to emerge: the victims were usually young servants.

No one knows precisely when Elizabeth started out to have a sick desire for torturing young girls. One report says that it may have started early. Her husband apparently built her a torture chamber to her requirements to please his wife. What we can say for certain is that from 1585approximately, she started out to torment the serving young girls in the castle and the local peasant girls. Nádasdy was reported to have participated a lot with Elizabeth’s cruel amusement, yet he may likewise have restrained her. But when Elizabeth Báthory was in full control of her husband’s estates, her torture started to savagely escalate.

Based on the surviving testimonies, she and/or her closest servants:

Kept the young girls chained up nighttime so tight their hands turned blue and they spurted blood.

Beat them to the stage where there was very much blood on the wall surfaces and beds that that they had to make use of ashes and cinders to soak it up.

Smeared a naked young girl with honey and kept her outdoor to be bitten by wasps, ants, wasps, flies and bees.

Burned her servants with metallic sticks; stuck burning iron rods into their vaginas and ironed the soles of their feet.

Strangled a servant to death with a silk scarf.

Stabbed the girls, pricked them in their fingernails and mouths with fine needles, cut their lips, noses and hands with scissors.

Stitched their tongues and lips together.

Had the servants stand in tubs of ice water up to their necks outside until they passed away.

Used knives, candles, needles or her own teeth to lacerate girls' genitals.

Make the girls sit on stinging nettles, bathe with said stinging nettles then. During the bath, she pushed the nettles into their breasts and shoulders.

Kept the girls from eating for a full week at a time, and, if they got thirsty, made them drink their own urine.

Warmed up a cake to red-hot temperatures and made it be consumed by a servant.

Forced the servants to cook and eat their own flesh .

Buried them in gardens, orchards, grain pits, and occasionally cemeteries; with rits sometimes, often without.

Stuffed five girls’ corpses underneath a bed and continued to give food to them as though they were still alive.

Made often fatal surgery on victims.

Torture devices of Elizabeth:

An iron maiden; it is similar to a coffin with spikes in it. The spikes don't impale you, but do cause bleeding. There are then two spikes that are driven into the eyes causing blindness; the victim then slowly bleeds to death.

A cyndrical cage, that is too narrow to sit in, and too small to stand in; it has spikes on it, and when the cage is rocked and hoisted, the vicitms will skewer themselves on it.

Elizabeth had numerous accomplices to help her kidnap, torture and kill the young girls.

Her accomplices were:

Anna Darvulia, a woman about whom very little is known, was Elizabeth's main accomplice during the period of time following Fenrec's death. When Anna died in 1609, after being very ill, Elizabeth obtained a new cohort, Erzsi Majorova, the widow of a local farmer.

Erzsi Majorova is mentioned as being the one mainly responsible for Elizabeth's ruin, by advising her to include noble girls amongst her victims. The Countess started to have troubles in obtaining sevant girls willing to work for her, as rumors of her diversions spread. She followed Majorova’s encouragment sometime in 1609. Majorova was also regarded as the brain behind the disposing of the murdered girls bodies.

Ficzkó, Elizabeth's manservant, was the only male servant to help with the torturing of the girls. He was referred to as a "dwarflike cripple".

Dorothea Szentes, also called Dorka, was a witch who trained Elizabeth in witchcraft and black magic. Dorka was Elizabeth's helping hand when she decided she wished to disipline her servants through torture. Dorka

likewise helped the torturing and killing of the peasants and noble girls for Elizabeth.

Ilona Jó was Elizabeth's old nurse from when she was a child and she was also the nurse of Elizabeth's children. Ilona Jó participated in the torture and killings.

Chapter 4: Investigation, Arrest, Trial and Death

Between 1602 and 1604, István Magyari, a Lutheran cleric, complained to the authorities in Vienna, however no actions would be taken for a long while. But Elizabeth was becoming so famous that her crimes could no longer be covered. In 1609, she murdered a noble young girl and she tried to stage as a suicide. The authorities finally made the decision to to act. Therefore, in 1610, Mathias II, the King of Hungary, asked Count György Thurzó to investigate the accusations. Thurzó was the governor of region, as well as cousin to Elizabeth.

On December 29th, 1610, Thurzó led 30 men to the Castle to see what was going on. He most likely wished to protect his cousin and the family name. When he arrived there, he saw a scene of dreadfulness that he had to take action. A young girl was lying dead on the floor, a girl was dying and

another was seriously wounded. Three servants were there holding instruments of torture and in the center of it was Elizabeth Báthory, who instructed them on how to torture the victims. Some girls were missing eyes and arms. Two more women, still alive, were found in other passages of the castle.

The Countess was taken to trial and many testified against her,the servants as well as survivors. The five-day trial begins on January 2nd, 1611, in Byteč. For political reason, Elizabeth Báthory is not present at the trial even she wanted to be; Thurzó refuses, even if a large number of Hungarian and Slovak nobles take her side. Although it was usual in those days, Thurzó also refuses to torture the accused. Historians still wonder how he managed to stand up to those pressure groups.

At the trial, her four accomplices, Dorka, Ficzkó, Katalin Beneczky, and Ilona Jó (Erzsi Majorova could not be found) were found guilty and their sentences pronounced. Witnesses testified to the deaths of 175 to 200 young women over a 25 years period between 1585 and 1610. These numbers had been confirmed by servants, nobles, clergy and local people. But at the January 7th trial probably the most surprising testimony came from a a servant who claimed that she saw a register in Elizabeth

Báthory's handwriting that mentioned 650 victims; still, this register was never found and the official count in the record books was 80.

Ilona Jó, Dorka, and Ficzkó received the death sentence. Ilona Jó and Dorothea Szentes had their fingers pulled from their hands with pincers and then burned alive. Because of his complicity in fewer crimes, Ficzkó was only beheaded. After that, his body was also burned. Katalin Beneczky, who appeared to have shown some mercy to the girls, escaped the death sentence, was imprisoned and there is no record of her ultimate fate. Erzsi Majorova was burned alive as a witch.

Elizabeth was never convicted, and she was held in a room in Csejte Castle for the rest of her life.The room contained no windows or doors, only a narrow opening for food to be passed through and a few slits for air. On July 31, 1614, Elizabeth dictated her testament to two priests. Her son Pal was the principal inheritor; what remained was divided equally among her other children.

In August 1614, one of her guards found her on the ground of her cell; Elizabeth Báthory was dead at the age of 54. Her body was placed in Ecsed, the original Báthory family seat. However, when villagers protested having the Infamous Lady in their cemetery, the body was moved; her

final resting place was in the family crypt in the castle where she was born.The location of her body today is unknown.

Part II: Vampire, Witch or Serial Killer?

Chapter 5: Was Elizabeth Báthory a Vampire?

Elizabeth Báthory supposedly killed a lot of of women, sometimes assisted by her subordinates. There were as well legendary tales of Elizabeth bathing in the blood of girls in the hope of remaining young, although more than one source claims the blood baths are only a legend; another source claims she drank the blood of young women. When Elizabeth Báthory was arrested, victims were found in the castle drained of blood. Numerous myths about her have continued to spread. The

countess's story illustrates how the myth of vampirism can be supported by the misinterpretation of the real actions of a disturbed criminal.

Elizabeth Báthory, who was implied to be a vampire, witch, werewolf, inspired many stories through the 18th and 19th centuries. She is most renowned for the allegation that she used to take baths in a vast porcelain tub loaded with young maids' blood; this is the oldest myth surrounding her. Drinking and bathing in blood determined people to say she was a vampire. These stories were born in light of the fact that she was known to be worried with about her looks. She thought that the virgins’ blood would keep her beautiful and young. The first mention of her bloodbaths appears over a hundred years after her death. In 1729, the Jesuit László Turóczi published his topography of Hungary and in this work the legend was conceived; the story was then mentioned in the book of Matej Bel, *NotitiaHungariae novae historico geographica*. Bel was sceptical about this particular detail, however he helped the legend to spread. His book was considered credible, as it was written by somebody with a high level of knowledge. Therefore, the story taken from Turóczi's book was not questioned.

Contemporary historian Radu Florescu has suggested that this legend has its foundations in the prejudices concerning the gender roles: women were

not regarded to be capable of violence for its own sake. Bloodbaths are definitely a myth, an attempt to explain her sadism. None of the servants who testified against the countess mention anything about this. Actually, what they do point out is that a whole lot blood was spilled during the tortures. So Elizabeth didn’t seem to be concerned with saving the blood that poured from her victims.

Elizabeth Báthory ’s association with Transylvania and blood made her a subject for vampire fiction; this became a part of her legend. Even in modern times, she is a staple of vampire stories, and her name is associated with the abuse of aristocratic power.The legends about her life, including the idea that she bathed in the blood of servant girls, are thought by some to have been the origin of several vampire myths, for example the Dracula story. McNally, a Báthory biographer, tried to establish the historical Elizabeth Báthory and the bloodbath myth as a source of influence for Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* (1897).

Dracula, created by the Irish author Bram Stoker, was primarily based on the Romanian Prince, Vlad Dracula, the Impaler. Stoker (1847 –1912) was an Irish writer and business director of the Lyceum Theatre in London. He wove together the existing vampire lore and several legends to establish the parameters of the modern vampire: aversions to garlic, sunlight, silver

and the cross, sleeping in coffins and the vampire exhibiting sharp canines. Stoker attached the Dracula name to his story, based on the historical Vlad Tepes (the Impaler). Dracula was much superior compared to the most famous fictional works of that period, and it became a bestseller, rekindling a gruesome interest in everything vampiric. McNally, who has written about the figure of Dracula in literature and history, in a book, "Dracula was a Woman," claims that Stoker's Count Dracula was also inspired by the legends of Elizabeth Báthory. Both historic figures are connected to vampirism, lycanthropy, witchcraft and black magic. Tepes is not known to have drunk the blood of his victims, while Elizabeth Báthory is known to have drunk and, as well, bathed in the blood of young girls. We cannot say for certain that she was a model for Stoker's count, but in the years since *Dracula* was released, the Blood Countess has exercised a strong fascination on many film-makers and writers.

Fascination with Elizabeth Báthory’s horendous crimes persists even today, and she is still a prominent figure in popular culture. Vampires quickly became a staple of Western culture, accelerated by the introduction of cinema. One of the earliest and most influential movies of the era was *Nosferatu*, an adaptation of the Dracula story. The official version of Dracula, released in 1931 by Bela Lugosi thrusted the concept

of the vampire firmly into the forefront of popular thought, where it has stayed ever since.

Horror has made Dracula and vampires fascinating over the years. *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer made three billion dollars worldwide. The facts of the real Dracula are terrifying, but nobody seems to know anything about Elizabeth Báthory, the "Blood Countess". Films such as *Twilight*, *Lost Boys* and *Interview with a Vampire* are all contemporary versions of the myth that Elizabeth Báthory's life created.

As noted, the blood bath is unsupported by the evidence of any of the witnesses; nevertheless, the story of Elizabeth Báthory has been seized upon by many authors and movie producers, for whom the combination of her sophistication, beauty, bisexuality and extreme cruelty have created the foundation for a lascivious retelling. The great risk in these retellings is usually that the violent murders of Báthory's victims should become simply a piece of background and Elizabeth's fascination pervades these stories, turning a cruel woman into a romantic figure.

The legend of the Blood Countess is part with the vampire lore of Eastern Europe. Vampire lore is common; there are legends of vampires in Peru and China, in Greece, Turkey, and Siberia. In Eastern Europe folklore there is also a tradition of blood drinkers: the Varcolac in Romania, the

Wilkalak in Poland, the Varaolae in Albania, the Vulcadlak in Slovenia. This folklore tradition permeates our culture today and forms the foundation of many novels, films, television shows and games.

In the novel *Cold Blood* by Syra Bond, the entire horror of Elizabeth Báthory 's life is captured within an expression of her warped imagination. The confused picture this produces creates a credible tandem world of torture and blood lust covered up in an overarching lack of regard for others.

Elizabeth Báthory is also the central figure in Andrei Codrescu’s novel *The Blood Countes.* The novel mixes historical fiction with horror and family drama; it follows the journalist Drake Báthory-Kereshtu, who’s haunted by the fact that his bloodline leads back to the" Blood Countess".

She is found as the main villain in *Dracula the un-dead*, written by Ian Holt and Dacre Stoker (Bram Stoker's great-grand nephew).

Elizabeth Báthory is featured in *Lord of the Vampires*, the third installment of *The Diaries of the Family Dracul* by Jeanne Kalogridis. In the novel, she is imagined as one of the Brides of Dracula.

Báthory is portrayed as one of the reincarnations of the demoness Lilith in the novel *Demoness* by Martin Kage.

There have been numerous films about, referring to, or containing characters based on Countess Elizabeth Báthory, such as:

La Noche de Walpurgis (The Night of the Walpurgis) was made in 1970 and it was directed by Leon Klimovsky. This is one of the numerous films based on the historical figure of Elizabeth Báthory, though liberties have been taken with the original character.

In 1971, England's famous horror studio Hammer Films offered up Ingrid Pitt in a tantalizing fright spin on Elizabeth Báthory, named *CountessDracula*. Here, she's named "Countess Elisabeth Nádasdy," but her crimes are just as lushly reprehensible.

Set in 1971 Belgium, *Daughters of Darkness* posits that Elizabeth Báthory's bloodbaths accomplished their goal. Delphine Seyrig stars as the Blood Countess, and the story chronicles her vampiric seduction of a young couple on their honeymoon. *Daughters of Darkness* is a cult favorite where refined seductiveness is blended with outbursts of violence.

Walerian Borowczyk merged eroticism and classic European art in his films, and nowhere does he do it more effectively than in the Elizabeth Báthory sequence of his sex-sadism-and-madness omnibus, *Immoral Tales* (1974). Paloma Picasso portrays the Countess. We see her picking one

young woman to have sex with before slaughtering her and bathing in the girl's blood.

The Báthory spoof *Mama Dracula* (1980) hinges on how tough it is for the Countess in present times to find the blood of virgins. In this film, Louise Fletcher stars as a matronly Countess.

Eternal (2004) is based loosely on the story of Elizabeth Báthory. The film follows the murderous and sexual escapades of Elizabeth King (the reincarnated version of Elizabeth Báthory for the 21st century). Similar to her historical counter part, Elizabeth thrives on the blood of young women to maintain her beauty and immortality. Nevertheless, the film tends to focus more so on the mythical vampiric qualities of the Countess in which Elizabeth not only bathes in the blood, but also sucks it and ingests it from her victims as a typical vampire.

In *Hostel: Part II* (2007), as Mrs. Bathory, Monika Malacova luxuriates in an extravagant old bathtub while, above her, Heather Matarazzo is hung nude, struggling and screaming, as she is slashed open and drained of her blood.

Bathory: Countess of Blood (2008) was the most expensive Czech/Slovak production ever. The director and cowriter Juraj Jakubisko seems to argue that Báthory was a misunderstood victim.

In the television show *American Horror Story*, the character Delphine LaLaurie is inspired by the New Orleans killer from the 1830s who tortured and murdered her slaves. LaLaurie's crimes were compared to those of Elizabeth Báthory, so that she is otherwise known as "American Elizabeth Báthory." Facts from the Blood Countess's life are woven into the LaLaurie story. The show's ruthless woman uses the blood of her servants in an attempt to maintain her beauty and youth.

Chapter 6: Was Elizabeth Báthory a Witch?

It has become complicated to differentiate the reality from the fiction regarding Elizabeth Báthory. After the blood baths, probably the most frequent embellishment is her involvement with the occult. The Countess was blamed of witchcraft and pagan practices. The legend says that she gathered around herself people of evil arts. Among them were those who stated to be alchemists, witches, seers, wizards, sorcerers. They taught her their crafts and she was captivated. She herself is accused of witchcraft, lycanthropy and vampirism.

These supernatural explanations for Elizabeth Báthory's horrifying crimes could provide a comfortable distance between her and the society. With

this distance, it is easier to assume that she couldn't have been human because of the horrific nature of her crimes. This is similar to the ideas behind psychopathy and modern media perceptions of psychopathy. Having a serial killer appear more inhuman is easier to accept than accepting that a human is capable of such atrocities. There might also be gender under currents in the depictions of Elizabeth Báthory as a vampire, lesbian, or witch. Due to the period of time , it is difficult to conceptualize of a male murderer, but a female murderer, especially one leading several killers, would have been unusual.

The modern depictions of Elizabeth Báthory continue to attribute supernatural forces to her crimes. For example, in 2009, Craft continue to describe her as a "Satan-worshiping, lesbian, witch" and in the 2006 film *Stay Alive*, Elizabteh Báthory is depicted as a supernatural force, a demon, that comes alive within a video game, becomes corporeal, and kills all those who participated in playing the game. She is illustrated as demonic, and somewhat inhuman, and, for that reason, distant from her victims.

Because of the fact that the common myths and rumors encompassing the Countess have escalated so significantly, many of the actual facts about her case have been lost and even accredited researchers have propagated these rumors and circulated them as certainty without offering support.

For example, in 1992, Segrave writes about the myths surrounding Báthory. The rumors of witchcraft, satanism, and lesbianism, were likely fabricated through simple word of mouth as people attempted to explain the atrocities she committed. Segrave only further perpetuate the standing rumors surrounding Elizabeth Báthory and keep people from the truth. He illustrates her in light of some evil queen, spending “hours admiring herself in front of a mirror” who was then walled up in her castle like a queen in a tower. The 2005 film *The Brothers Grimm* depicts a female antagonist highly similar to Elizabeth Báthory rumors and the Grimm fairy tales evil queens. The woman in this film is known to obsess over her beauty to the point of destroying others, and using the youth of young, virgin girls to maintain her beauty.

This account of Elizabeth Báthory illustrates how rumors can be powerful. Many of Segrave’s sources were ones known to have accepted the rumors of Elizabeth’s blood baths and witch-lesbian ways such as *Dracula Was a Woman* by Raymond McNally and *The Bloody Countess* by Valentine Penrose. Craft affirms that both these are interesting books, but they both accepted the rumors surrounding Elizabeth Báthory, not necessarily the facts of her case.

Over the years since Báthory's notorious crimes, the rumors circulating the actual events escalated. This is not unusual for terrible acts committed in Medieval and Renaissance eras. According to Hickey, "some of the early European serial killers were thought to have been vampires or other creatures of the night" when in reality were only depraved murderers. Segrave affirms that European killers of the time were often nobility and their number of victims typically achieved such high numbers because as nobility they were able to escape with their crimes for very long periods of time. Elizabeth Báthory was a very notorious aristocrat who was considered by other nobles and the clergy to be a kind woman who acted like a proper Lady (Craft).

However, the peasants living in the towns around her properties started out to notice the bizarre occurrences: disappearing young women, cries of anguish and despair from her property, and the rate of coffins and dead girls leaving her property with the cause of deaths labeled as disease, natural, or unknown (Craft). Rumors commenced to spread and given the religious aspects of society at these times, dark, demonic rumors were likely included. However, with time, these rumors and myths -particularly after the Báthory's death- became known as fact.

Her legend has persisted throughout the years since her death. Though Joseph Zsuffa, wrote a scholarly biographical novel in 2015 in an attempt to separate folklore from truth and exonerate Elizabeth Báthory from all of the charges she was accused of, the evidence against the Countess is too overwhelming. There are an estimated one hundred bodies buried at Csejte Castle, with more in the other estates owned by Elizabeth and her family. As long as those bodies and the paperwork and accounts exist, Elizabeth Báthory will always be remembered as one of the most notorious female serial killers of all time.

Chapter 7: Was Elizabeth Báthory the World's Most Prolific Serial Killer?

So that we can consider a person serial killer, he or she must have personally killed three or more people. Serial killers usually tend to be men. Actually, there is no certain profile for women serial killers. Nevertheless, if history and evidential accounts are accurate, Elizabeth Báthory is the most prolific serial killer of all time.

Before an individual is named a serial killer, a question is required to be asked: "How did this person become a killer?" The response is based on

the progress of the person from birth to adulthood, his conduct being affected by life experiences and biological factors. Serial killers, just like everyone, are the outcome of their inheritance and the options they make in their life.

The psychological profile of a serial killer is: antisocial personality disorder that is characterized by the violation of the rights of other people. It begins in childhood or early adolescence, persists through adulthood, and comprises deceitfulness, irresponsibility, manipulations and unstable social relationships. We are able to discover the predisposition of an individual for killing from his childhood, because a killer had been in his life a victim as well.

Serial killers have a substantial influence on the society, mass media and individual beliefs. People are captivated by murder, especially when it comes to serial killers. This is exactly why the mass media provides so much information about serial killers to the public. However, the media tends to exaggerate, causing the people to become intrigued, worried, despite the fact that they obtain their information from investigators, witnesses, and statistical records.

Was the Countess “history’s most prolific serial killer”? In the case of Elizabeth Báthory, differentiating between reality and fiction is

complicated. The evidence presented at court was amplified by several authors and the entertainment industry, who recycle the image of a cruel murderer bathing in blood. It is certain, however, that Báthory holds the Guinness World Record for the most prolific murderer of the western world.

Based on the nature of Elizabeth Báthory's criminal acts, perhaps it is simple to name her a psychopath. A psychopathic syndrome is associated with distortions of feelings and affections, possessing odd behaviors, desires and moral dispositions. A psychopath comes with an unpredictable way of life, leads a separate life even within family unit and has the inability to develop affectionate and responsive relationships together with a lack of empathy, for the reason that he or she finds it difficult to comprehend suffering or pain in other people.

Using modern research on the construct of psychopathy it is important to understand first, that Elizabeth Báthory is a serial killer, but not all serial killers are psychopaths.

The first distinction is the type of aggression exhibited. Psychopathy is associated with predatory aggression, in which no conscious emotional experience is present in the perpetrator and the violence is planned.

The other type of aggression is affective, in which the perpetrator reacts to stimuli, commits violence due to a loss of control and has an experience of intense emotional experience.

Given the knowledge that Elizabeth Báthory had a specific type of victim - young girls -, and knowing how brutally tortured the victims were, it is more likely that she participated in reactive aggression, rather than predatory.

The second modern theory to keep in mind when analyzing Elizabeth Báthory is the lack of information we have about her biology. Her violence could be attributed to an abnormality in her prefrontal cortex, which primarily controls executive functioning and control, based on the fact that we know she was inbred. We also know that she experienced epilepsy, which could also contribute to the way in which she committed her crimes due to brain abnormalities or even damage.

We have only Elizabeth Báthory's testament: what are graphologists' opinions about her character, based on examining her handwriting? There are several opinions concerning her personality.

I. Szádeczky-Kardoss had a graphological done; she also asked Klára Ács, who examined the complete text of the testament. She found out from the handwriting that its writer had been a strong, determined, and self-

confident personality, with a logical mind and a manly character. Báthory requested order in everything; she was not much loved, rather respected. Her handwriting does not show any signs of sexual deviation or sadism, neither signs of pathology. Nevertheless, the signature, from the period right before she died, bears signs of schizophrenia.

Another graphologist provided the following opinion: her sadism might came from unfulfilled love, due to the fact that she was forced to marry somebody other than whom she loved. According to her handwriting, she was not insane or schizophrenic, as several of her biographers claim. When the graphologist was asked about signs indicating a sexual deviation or sadism, she gave a negative answer.

Tomáš Gugenberger, another graphologist, provided a completely different opinion: Elizabeth Báthory only had few good qualities: generosity, religiousness, and dignity. She had many bad qualities: she was impatient, self-contented, emotional, distrustful, egocentric, insensate, impulsive, irritable, unpredictable, guileful and indecisive; she was controlled by cruelty, strong sexual desire and self-indulgence. In 1610 a tendency for cruelty, criminality, unstableness and perversity joined; all these features determined her sadism. Also a mental disorder appeared. So even the

graphologists do not agree on the characteristics of Elizabeth Báthory's personality.

Chapter 8: Murderer or Victim?

Many historians, from Hungary especially, affirmed that the trial was fabricated. Elizabeth Báthory's nephew, Gabriel Báthory, was at the head of Transylvania and her uncle, Stephen Báthory, was the King of Poland when she was imprisoned. Historians declare that King Matthias owed a huge personal debt to Ferenc Nádasdy for the wars gained on the king’s behalf. Therefore, the King needed grounds to not pay back his debt to Nádasdy 's widow. On the other hand, Thurzó wanted her great fortune and attempted to marry her, but Elizabeth refused. After her sentencing, Thurzó became legal guardian of Elizabeth's children, which allowed him to manage her estate, and the King’s debt to her was cleared. But even there was a conspiracy against Elizabeth Báthory, it is hard to assume that she was totally innocent. If so, the Countess would beone of the most deadly women in history.

Elizabeth Báthory has become a symbol, a legend; nobody would fight for the truth of her story today, as nobody did in 1610–1614. Why should we

destroy such a great story? Why should we consider that the Countess was innocent when the then tendency has been the opposite? Elizabeth Báthory and her violent legacy sells. Whatever the truth, it is evident that she was involved in some macabre activities.

Elizabeth Báthory's guilt has been seiously scrutinized considering she was not permitted to defend herself in court. It was not just her behavior that would have been on trial, but also the aristocracy. Therefore, we must ask: was Elizabeth Báthory also a victim? The recent reassessment of the Countess has given an air of ambiguity and mystery to her legacy. The fact that there are more questions than answers has only served to increase interest in her case.

Various authors including László Nagy and Dr. Irma Szádeczky-Kardoss have suggested that Elizabeth Báthory was the victim of a conspiracy. László Nagy claimed that the proceedings against the Countess were politically motivated. This theory is in accordance with Hungarian history at that time, which included political and religious conflict.

The physical evidence collected by the investigators, including several bodies, dead and dying girls found in the castle, would also have to be disputed. Szádeczky-Kardoss argues the physical evidence was exaggerated. Thurzó misrepresented dead and wounded victims, for the

reason that disgracing Elizabeth would considerably benefit his political ambitions.

It could be that Elizabeth Báthory was a sadistic murderer, or that she was just a harsh mistress whose enemies turned against her. It could also be argued that Báthory's position had become so strong thanks to her power and wealth, and a threat to leaders of Hungary. The act of accusing a wealthy widow of sexual impropriety , witchcraft or murder to seize her lands was not uncommon during that period of time.

However, there is a wealth of historical documents and evidence substantiating the gruesome details of Elizabeth Báthory's serial murders and psychopathic behaviour. We have also seen that the line between fact and fiction often become blurred and at times even blend together. The Blood Countess' story continues to draw the interest of historians, critics and artists.